

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 BIB-01 MCT-01 /070 W

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P R 181130Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6560

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL MADRAS

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

CINCPAC

COMIPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD: COMIPAC FOR IC AND 1225

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE

SUBJECT: AS STRIKE ENDS, POLITICAL SITUATION REMAINS IN FLUX

REF: COLOMBO 0194

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH THE STRIKE THAT HAS UPSET LIFE IN COLOMBO SINCE BEFORE CHRISTMAS HAS NOW ENDED, THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES REMAIN UNCLEAR. IN RETROSPECT, MOST PEOPLE JUDGE THE STRIKE TO HAVE BEEN DOOMED WHEN OPPOSITION UNIONS FAILED TO PARALYZE THE BUS SYSTEM, AS THEY HAD THE TRAINS. GOVERNMENT IS STILL THREATENING TO SACK SOME PARTICIPANTS IN THE STRIKE BUT MAY NOT WANT TO GIVE THE UNIONS ANOTHER GRIEVANCE TO HOLD AGAINST IT. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY (CP, STILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COALITION PARTNERS, THE FATE OF SLFP RENEGADES, AND THE EFFECT OF THE STRIKE ON THE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY AND ITS SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT, ARE QUESTIONS DOMINATING POLITICAL CONVERSATION IN COLOMBO. END SUMMARY.

2. EXCEPT FOR THE RAILWAYS, WHICH ARE HAVING A FEW MECHANICAL DIFFICULTIES IN RETURNING TO FULL SERVICE,

OTHER SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY AFFECTED BY THE NOW-ENDED STRIKE HAVE RETURNED TO NEAR-NORMAL. THERE IS STILL SOME SHORTAGE OF BREAD AND FLOUR, A PROBLEM THAT PRE-DATED BUT WAS AGGRAVATED BY THE STRIKE AND NOW BY HOARDING. CENSORSHIP OF STRIKE-RELATED NEWS CONTINUES.

3. LOOKING BACK ON THE STRIKE, OBSERVERS HERE JUDGE THE TWO TURNING POINTS CRUCIAL TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ULTIMATE SUCCESS IN BREAKING THE STRIKE TO HAVE BEEN THE PARTIAL FAILURE OF THE STRIKE AT THE NATIONALIZED BUS CORPORATION AND THE DECISION OF WORKERS AT THE CEYLON PETROLEUM CORPORATION NOT TO JOIN THE STRIKE DESPITE URGINGS FROM THE LSSP. IF THOSE TWO GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFULLY STRUCK IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND NOT THE UNIONS WHICH FINALLY CAPITULATED. THE HERO OF THE DAY FOR THE GOVERNMENT IS BUS COMPANY CHAIRMAN JACK KOTELAWALA, HIMSELF AN OLD LSSP MAN AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ENOUGH ABOUT THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO BEAT IT AT ITS OWN GAME. HE HAS FIRED SOME OF THE RINGLEADERS AND THERE ARE REPORTS THAT AS MANY AS 1,100 STRIKERS ARE THREATENED WITH BEING SACKED. THE PHRASE BEING USED BY THE BUS COMPANY IS "ALL CASES WILL BE JUDGED ON THEIR INDIVIDUAL MERITS." THIS PROBABLY MEANS THAT ONLY A FEW WILL EVENTUALLY BE DISCHARGED, IN ORDER THAT THE LEFTIST UNIONS NOT BE FURTHER ANGERED.

4. WITH THE STRIKE OFFICIALLY OVER, OR "SUSPENDED," AS THE DISGRUNTLED UNIONS PUT IT. THE MAIN ACTIVITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN COLOMBO APPEARS TO BE POLITICAL SPECULATION. THE UNUSUAL POLITICAL LINEUPS SEEN DURING THE DAYS OF THE STRIKE AND THE UNCOMMON SILENCE OF THE MOST POLITICAL LEADERS HAS GIVEN RISE TO MORE THAN THE USUAL RUMORS AND GOSSIP. THE COMMUNIST PARTY IS AT THE CENTER OF MOST OF THE SPECULATION. AS A CONSTITUENT OF THE RULING UNITED FRONT AND WITH A MEMBER IN THE CABINET, THE COMMUNISTS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO TOE THE PRIME MINISTER'S LINE. INSTEAD THEY FOUND THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE "WORKERS' STRUGGLE" OVERRIDING. THE CP DAILY PAPER DIDN'T HESITATE TO SUPPORT THE STRIKE WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS EVIDENCED BY THE LARGE EXPANSES OF WHITE SPACE IT PUBLISHED AFTER CENSORSHIP WAS IMPOSED. THE PARTY LEADERSHIP, REPRESENTED BY RIVALS PIETER KEUNEMAN, MINISTER OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION, AND HARD-LINER DR. S.A. WICKREMASINGHE, MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENTS DURING THE LENGTHY STRIKE, BUT THEIR SILENCE WAS INTERPRETED AS SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKERS.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE DISLOYALTY OF THE CP IS NOT KNOWN BUT IT CAN BE ASSUMED THAT SHE IS EXTREMELY DISPLEASED. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT SHE WILL CALL MINISTER KEUNEMAN ON THE CARPET AND ASK FOR AN APOLOGY AS A CONDITION FOR STAYING IN THE UNITED FRONT. BUT SHE CAN ILL AFFORD TO LOSE THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WITH AN ELECTION COMING UP SOMETIME THIS YEAR; HER PARTY'S PROSPECTS AT THAT ELECTION ARE NOT SO ROSY THAT SHE CAN AFFORD TO DUMP A COALITION PARTNER AT THIS STAGE. THE HARD-LINE WING OF THE CP HAS ALWAYS BEEN READY TO LEAVE THE COALITION AND JOIN THE LSSP IN A LEFT SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT; THE YOUTH WING OF THE PARTY IS REPORTEDLY PARTICULARLY EAGER TO LEAVE THE COALITION.

6. THE LSSP WOULD LIKE THE CP TO BREAK OFF AND JOIN THEM; THEIR OWN ELECTORAL STRENGTH WAS PROVED TO BE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINISCULE AT A RECENT BY-ELECTION. THE THIRD CONSTITUENT OF THE PROPOSED "SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT" IS THE SLFP LEFT WING AND IT TOO HAS BEEN SHOWING SIGNS OF RESTIVENESS. SPECULATION SURROUNDS THE PLANS OF FOUR SLFP M.P.'S --NANDA ELLAWALA, TENNYSON EDIRISURIYA, A.M. JINADASA, AND P.G. ARIYATILLEKE. ALL FOUR ARE RUMORED TO HAVE BEEN DENIED RENOMINATION ON THE SLFP TICKET FOR THE COMING ELECTION. ELLAWALA HAS BEEN PRIMINENT IN STRIKE NEWS AS THE ONE SLFP M.P. WHO BROKE RANKS TO DECLARE SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKERS AND TO LEAD HIS OWN UNION OFF THE JOB. THESE FOUR POLITICIANS PRESENT THE PM WITH ANOTHER DILEMMA. IF SHE IS TO EXPEL ELLAWALA OR ANTAGONIZE THE OTHERS TO THE POINT OF CAUSING THEM TO RESIGN, THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT OF THE LSSP WILL HAVE ITS FIRST NEW RECRUITS.

REED

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## Message Attributes

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